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Freelance Writer

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WC iUniverse Special Event
SPAN Founder & Author Marilyn Ross
"Jump Start Your Book Sales"
September 25, 2001

Marilyn Ross is not only the head and heart of SPAN (Small Publishers Association of North America), she heads up SelfPublishingResources.com and is an expert on self-promotion. In fact, she wrote the book -- "Jump Start Your Book Sales."

Ms. Ross and her husband Tom have toured the nation for years speaking on the magic of the writer's life and how to make a success of it. Dozens of chatters stopped by to ask questions of their own. WRTR Rams was our host. Kelly Milner Halls typed for Ms. Ross.

HOST WRTR Rams: As an author, it is your responsibility to do the majority of the promotion. But where do you start? How can you create your own success in the publishing business? Marilyn Ross, can and will show you. Tonight, we are going to learn how to engage her magic secrets into our own. Marilyn, would you tell us the one major marketing idea that many authors overlook?

Marilyn Ross: I think that many times, they don't realize how important it is to follow through and to be persistent. It's always amazing to me when I realize it's the 5th, 6th or 7th contact before I strike gold. So don't give up. Realize that many times, when you get a no, it brings you closer to a yes.

HOST WRTR Rams: Are you talking about being persistent with the same person/company? Or just being persistent in general in every marketing aspect?

Marilyn Ross: I'm talking primarily about having an attitude of persistence. However, I'm a great believer in the 80/20 rule. That means that you get 80% of your results from 20% of your efforts, customers and contacts. So it's important to focus and target in on those buyers or associations or opportunities that will yield you the best and greatest results. You don't always know what will yield the best results until you get going. Then you start to see, for example, that perhaps you have a knack for speaking and can sell books after you speak at the back of the room. But applying common sense goes a long ways. For instance, you know you need distributors to get your books in stores. So it's important to focus your attention on these contacts. Make them aware that you are an assertive promoter and not give up easily.

HOST WRTR Rams: Let's take a question from our audience. spywriter0 asks: what can I do to assist my publisher in Australia with getting my books distributed up here via B & N and Amazon and through small press distributors

Marilyn Ross: First of all, talk with your publisher and make sure that you have the okay to do that. Because, unbelievably, sometimes publishers are resistant to their authors attempts at certain things. If the book is doing well in Australia already, piggy back on that success when approaching anyone in the US. Call B&N headquarters, for example and find the buyer for the genre of your book. Then give them the facts you already have...reviews, figures, etc.

HOST WRTR Rams: Speaking of reviews, is that a good way to start marketing?

Marilyn Ross: I believe that's absolutely the best way to market. We've sold as many as 500 books for the full retail price off of one review. Reviews are free advertising. Contrary to paid



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advertising, its the reviewer saying your book is good and not just you. Don't always depend on the review section or pages of newspapers, however to get press. Get OFF the book pages. Go into sections like lifestyle, sports, religion, business. Depending on the topic of your book, that's where your readers are. Unfortunately, many of them never even LOOK at the book pages. Always remember that you are presenting yourself as an expert in your subject area, assuming it's nonfiction, rather than an author, when you deal with the media.

HOST WRTR Rams: And what if your book is fiction? How would a review help then?

Marilyn Ross: Then you have a tougher job. One of the things we teach people in our books, **THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO SELF PUBLISHING** and **JUMP START YOUR BOOK SALES** is to look at marketing at the writing stage. As a fiction author, hopefully you have introduced a theme that might parallel current events or resent important issues. Also look at the interests and hobbies of your protagonist. For instance, someone who does spelunking might find a ready market in shops that sell gear for cave exploration. Also think about your book from a regional standpoint when looking for a marketing angle. Does it take place in a certain area with landmarks, where you have a ready audience because of that connection?

HOST WRTR Rams: Let me get this straight. For instance if you have a book that deals with sports, it would be better to promote the book to that audience?

Marilyn Ross: Yes, that's correct. Because the people interested in sports won't always read the book section. So think about the section that relates to your topic, then go after those reporters.

HOST WRTR Rams: patballard asks: What are your thoughts on online marketing?

Marilyn Ross: I think online marketing is excellent and an area that every author should tap into. What I do, when I have a new book coming out, is to look at sites that would be appropriate, and by the way, my favorite search engine is Google.com. If you simply enter the topic of our book, you will be led on a merry chase for links. On a spread sheet, I make notes about these things. 1. Do they do reviews. 2. Do they sell books online. 3. Do they have articles by experts in the topic area. 4. Do they do chats where I might participate. 5. Is there an online newsletter that might welcome my articles or review the book. The Internet is going to be even more important in the years to come. By learning to use it well NOW, you put yourself in a more competitive position.

HOST WRTR Rams: Marilyn, what are your thoughts about writing articles for online publications without being paid? Is it worth it to promote book sales?

Marilyn Ross: I'm a great believer in giving your writing away. Now let me qualify that. I'm very willing to donate an article as long as it carries a nice bio at the end that includes full ordering information for my book. This applies to in print publications as well as those on the Internet. I've sold at one time, over \$2500 worth of product from one article which I gave away.

HOST WRTR Rams: That's amazing. Marilyn, I've heard a bit about the upcoming conference in Georgia. Can you explain a bit more about it?

Marilyn Ross: Yes, it's sponsored by SPAN, which is the Small Publishers Association of North America. This is an organization that Tom and I founded six years ago. The publishing college and trade show will feature 26 experts from the writing and publishing field. They will talk about strategies on how to be more successful in selling books and growing your career. It's in Atlanta, October 19 - 21. You can get full details online at www.spanet.org/2001. It is going to be FANTASTIC. Conferences like this are also a wonderful way to make contacts and network with others who may be more experienced than you. This is a wonderful, sharing industry. Especially now, with our current economy. It's important for people not to close in, but rather to learn new marketing strategies and associate with others who are moving ahead. I don't know if all of you realize what an honor it is to be associated with books. Books change lives. They even SAVE lives. Especially now, books on humor, motivation and other uplifting topics are especially important. Tom and I feel blessed to be in a position to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of people through our work. You have that opportunity as well.

HOST WRTR Rams: Since you brought it up, how can conferences promote book sales? I guess I think of conferences as being a way to network with other writers, editors and



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publishers.

Marilyn Ross: That's because you've never been to a SPAN conference. We concentrate on marketing techniques. For instance, Greg Godek will be talking about how he came from a self publisher to become a mega-bestseller. He'll share his inside tips. We'll talk about the growing body, mind spirit marketplace and how books you never thought could cross over are applicable to this audience. Also, about how to get your book into various kinds of alternative outlets, such as gift shops, but much beyond that as well. We have a sales expert that will talk about 21st century selling strategies and other presentations and panels that look at how to create a sizzling publicity campaign and write hypnotic news releases. We believe in delivering immediately usable proven information to sell more books.

HOST WRTR Rams: Sounds like my kind of conference. What if we can't make it? Will transcripts be available?

Marilyn Ross: We have tapes available and by going to the website I mentioned earlier, you can order a set of tapes. And also, the new edition of the COMPLETE GUIDE TO SELF PUBLISHING will be coming out in December from Writer's Digest Books. Anyone who wants information on that should email me at Marilyn@MarilynRoss.com and put the word "Guide" in the subject line.

HOST WRTR Rams: I've left Tracey on a limb for much too long tonight. She would like to know what your desk or work space looks like?

Marilyn Ross: A mess. I have two desk because my theory was I could clear one off if I had a second desk. Of course, that didn't work, so now I have two desks with piles of goodies. But since I have my fingers in a lot of pies, that's probably my destiny. Even though there are many stacks, I am well organized and can usually find what I need.

HOST WRTR Rams: Here's a good question. AskRichard asks: How do you feel about Radio and TV Reporter? Is it different marketing on radio and TV?

Marilyn Ross: Certainly, it's one of the possibilities to investigate. Typically, people do get results. More often than not, however, not big shows. If you need some practice, this would be an excellent place to dip your toes in the water. I feel radio is better than TV, primarily because you get more time. A TV spot, if you're lucky enough to secure one, is typically only 3 or 4 minutes, whereas radio can range up to half an hour, even an hour. They differ in the following ways. For TV, you must have something visual...for instance, a cooking demo or show how to make something you'll be more attractive to TV because they are looking for that visual angle. On radio, your voice must do all the work, so it's vital that you are enthusiastic and well prepared to answer questions. In either case, be sure you've read your book recently! It can be most embarrassing, if you're on a live show and you find one of the rare hosts who's actually read your book, asking a specific question that you don't remember the answer to.

On a slightly different subject, my favorite form of promotion, however, is print. It's recyclable. When you get a feature story about you, an article about ten tips or a review, this can always be added to your media kit. People like to climb on a moving bandwagon. The more you can show your success in other print media, the more likely you are to get more. Print also has a lasting quality. We've had people contact us as much as four years after an article appeared, which they had clipped and saved.

HOST WRTR Rams: In general, which marketing techniques get the best results?

Marilyn Ross: Well, that depends on the book and the author. But my instincts go to print. Print is also easier for those who are shy. For some writers, the thought of getting in front of a microphone or TV camera is terrifying. But chatting with a reporter in person or over the phone is comfortable.

HOST WRTR Rams: Tracey asks: What's been the marketing tool that's most helped your book?

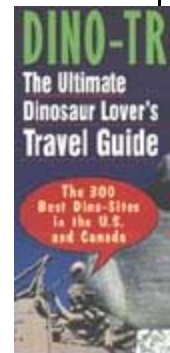
Marilyn Ross: One of the things we do as a marketing tool is public speaking. In fact, we just returned from a whirlwind driving tour (we live in Colorado) to Portland, Seattle and Canada because we have committed to giving four speeches. We always sell our books and typically a



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My first book,



I'm feeling a little to Brenda G



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few select other related titles at the back of the room. Because people want to take a little piece of us away with them, they are often excited about purchasing an autographed copy. This is also a great way to add to your data base. Always be on the lookout for full contact information for people who do or MIGHT purchase your books. Hopefully, this will not be the only book you write. So you want to cultivate a list of folks who might like to hear about your next treasure.

HOST WRTR Rams: LisaMHG asks: What people would you send a free book to get word of mouth started?

Marilyn Ross: First of all, I'm a great believer in giving away complimentary books. This is your best sales tool. You need to do a lot of research either in the library or on the Internet. Find out the associations that deal with your topic, and be sure that the publications editor receives a copy of your book. Look in a directory of magazines to find all of the periodicals and newsletters that relate to your topic and get them a book. Consider syndicated columnists who might give you a plug. Also look for leaders in your industry. Hopefully, you are involved in your industry and know who these people are. In fact, you may know many of them personally. You can get them a review copy now, or approach them earlier with your edited manuscript. Ask if they will give you a testimonial blurb. Also look at the regional opportunities, not only your daily paper, but weekly papers, alternative newspapers, area magazines and others who can help you spread the news. Word of mouth is important. You're wise to realize that Lisa. Another suggestion is to never stop sending out copies. If you're on the ball, you'll learn of new opportunities all the time. One of the reason our complete guide to self publishing has been in print since 1979 is that we are relentless self promoters. Of course, it doesn't matter how many review copies you send out, if you don't have passion for your book. You are the best sales person. You know the subject inside out. Deliver everything within your power to your reader. And LOVE what you do.

HOST WRTR Rams: Marilyn, a moment ago we were talking about newsletters. Is it acceptable to send newsletters via email? Or is print the way to go?

Marilyn Ross: Do you mean contacting a newsletter or creating one?

HOST WRTR Rams: Creating your own to send to fans.

Marilyn Ross: I'm assuming you're talking about e-newsletters. First of all, recognize that if you start a newsletter, it's like getting married. I'm on issue 62 of the SPAN Connection newsletter I do every month. It seems like I no more than finish one than it's time to get started again. So be willing to commit to a long term situation if you want to do a newsletter. This is a great way to showcase your talents and products. However, doing the newsletter is only half of the battle. You must get the word out and drive traffic to your site. This is a subject that would take a whole chat in itself.

HOST WRTR Rams: You bring up a good point. Should all media contact be via snail mail when are working on the marketing angle?

Marilyn Ross: I use a combination of techniques. If for instance, I'm trying to approach a website, I'll use email because that's the venue they are used to. Sometimes I will contact journalists with a brief teaser and refer them to my website if they are interested in the particulars. Snail mail, of course, still has it's place. It's really a question of judgment. But I favor a combination. One of the stats in the business world is that you must make seven contacts before you make a single sale. Now don't everybody leave me just because I said that! There are lots of ways to make contacts. You can do it via email, via fax, telephone, through the mails, with a postcard, a letter, a brochure, etc. The point is, you need to get in front of people in any and every way you can possibly think of on a repeated basis. That's how you really stir up word of mouth. Remember those reviews we talked about earlier? Send copies of those to wholesalers you're wooing...or other quantity book buyers. Recycle your print media and use that as one of the seven ways to get in touch with people.

HOST WRTR Rams: spywriter0 asks: My question is: What steps do I need to have a successful book launching. I was thinking about including a small talk on how to get published overseas at my launching but I am not sure if that would be a good idea. What's your thoughts on this?

Marilyn Ross: What is the title and topic of your book?



Dinosaur Mum
Albino Anim
Wild Dogs

HOST WRTR Rams: Poetry, he teaches a class in marketing poetry.

Marilyn Ross: Giving a speech on publishing overseas is really iffy. The problem is, very few people in the overall consumer audience are interested in getting published, number one. And number two, there is an even smaller amount of individuals who would want to do this overseas. What you might do is give a talk on how poetry helps us express our feelings, especially right now when there is a lot of anger and frustration and sadness in the country. Poetry and writing can be a wonderfully therapeutic tool. This would be the approach I would take.

HOST WRTR Rams: spywriter0 also asks: What sort of advice to she have for arranging signings at bookstores and libraries out of state?

Marilyn Ross: Don't JUST do a book signing. Make it an event. If it's nonfiction, do a mini-seminar on your topic. If it's fiction or poetry, a reading is appropriate. You might even consider creating a panel with two or three others who write in you genre. That way you have a better chance at drawing a larger audience because each of the participants should be contacting their own personal lists. We devote a whole chapter in JUMP START ... to how to do effective signings. There are many, many strategies that make a difference.

HOST WRTR Rams: Marilyn, you have had some terrific answers tonight. Is there anything you'd like to talk about that we haven't covered tonight?

Marilyn Ross: I would just like to thank everyone for joining us and wish them success in their publishing careers.

HOST WRTR Rams: And that is a wrap. Marilyn, thank you so much for taking time to visit with us. I know I learned something tonight ;-)

Marilyn Ross: Thanks so much for having me. Good night.

Comments? Email me: KellyMilnerH@aol.com
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